Scleroconus acutellus (Eversmann) (Lep.: Pyralidae) new to Middlesex, as a probable primary immigrant

A single example of a pyralid moth that I did not recognise came to my garden light in Barnet on the night of 9 June 2004. The moth was retained and a digital photograph of the live insect was duly made and e-mailed to the county recorder, Colin Plant, for an opinion. Although photographs are far from ideal for naming unusual species, they do allow for a rapid response and, as a result of the combined efforts of Colin, Brian Goodey and Barry Goater, the moth was unanimously named as *Scleroconus acutellus* (Evers.) almost by return. This species is not featured in Goater (1986. *British pyralid* moths) but illustrations can be viewed in Palm (1986. *Nordeuropas Pyralider*) and Slamka (1997. *Die Ziinslerartigen (Pyraloidea) Mitteleuropas*) – though neither work figures the genitalia of either sex. The Barnet specimen is preserved in Colin Plant's collection. Although my postal address is Hertfordshire, my garden is some 100 metres across the boundary into the Middlesex vice-county in the northern part of London.

Previous records of this species in Britain are few. Those published, appear to be:

Leckford, Hampshire, 8 August 1988 (P. H. Sterling. *Ent. Rec.* **101**: 153, 226);

Virginia Water, Surrey, 13 June 1989 (P. J. Baker. *Br. J. ent. Nat. Hist.* **7**: 35);

Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, 20 June 1995 (D. Wedd. *Br. J. ent. Nat. Hist.* **9**: 225);

Exeter, Devon, 13 June 1999,14 June 1999 and 5 July 1999 (P. Butter. *Atropos* **8**: 11-12);

West Wittering, West Sussex, [2000 - no specific date noted] (M. Love *vide* T. Davis. *Atropos* **11**:56).

I am informed that another example was taken by Mark Parsons during 2003, and so the Barnet example appears to be the seventh occurrence in Britain. The moth is found, naturally, in the Danube Basin of central Europe where it is associated with reed *Phragmites*. Both Paul Butter (*Atropos* **8**: 11-12) and Tony Davis (*Atropos* **11**: 56) have suggested that British records of this species may relate to accidental importations with reeds for thatching and indeed, in introducing the Devon records noted above, Butter was quick to point out that his cottage had recently been re-thatched with reed imported from Hungary. There seems no doubt that this was the source of his records. Similarly, the West Wittering record was made not too far from a newly thatched building (Tony Davis, pers. comm.).

There do not appear to be any thatched cottages or other sources of imported reed in this part of north London – and another explanation is required for the moth's sudden appearance in Barnet. There are two possibilities. First, it may be relevant that the moth appeared on a night of immigrant insect activity, which had been preceded by several weeks without such activity. During the daytime of 9 June 2004 large numbers of Painted Lady butterflies *Cynthia cardui* L. and Silver Y moths *Autographa gamma* (L.) suddenly appeared at several localities in London, with several hundreds of each noted by Colin Plant on the northern bank of the Thames at Barking Level. In my own garden trap on the same night I recorded both Silver Y and

the Diamond-backed Moth *Plutella xylostella* (L.); the latter was also noted in Bishops Stortford by Colin Plant whilst in Takeley, North Essex, Geoffrey Sell captured a Small Mottled Willow *Spodoptera exigua* (Hb.). The following night, a Striped Hawk-moth was noted in Sussex by Tim Freed (Colin Plant – personal communication); doubtless there were other immigrants that I am not aware of. The main area of residency of *acutellus* is central Europe and this does not fit too well with the expected source of other immigrants noted at the time. However, Karsholt & Razowski (1996. *The Lepidoptera of Europe: A distributional checklist*) note *acutellus* in most European countries, including France and Spain. It is, therefore, possible that the Barnet specimen was a primary immigrant.

The second explanation is rather more daring. It is based upon the fact that on some warm, humid nights, garden moth traps situated miles from the nearest marshland habitat suddenly start catching marshland moths. On the night before there are none and the next night there are none either! For some reason, these wetland moths all take to the air on the same evening and some are caught in traps. Much documentary evidence exists, but space prohibits its full presentation here. Evidence for such an occurrence on the night of 9 June 2004 is slender, but Colin Plant informs me that Geoffrey Sell captured *Schoenobius gigantella* (D. & S.) in his garden in Takeley, North Essex – a most unexpected occurrence of another moth that is also associated with reed. Could it be that *Scleroconus acutellus* is in fact already established as a resident moth in some of the southern wetland sites of England – perhaps overlooked as the now increasingly common *Nascia cilialis* (Hb.). This is not totally beyond the bounds of possibility as the example of the Toadflax Brocade *Calophasia lunula* (Hufn.) illustrates. This noctuid is normally confined to the shingle beaches of the south-east of England, but several examples taken in moth traps in London during 2003 were thought to relate to primary immigrants. Larvae certainly resulted from some of these arrivals, including at Tower Hamlets in eastern London (also Middlesex) where several were found by Terry Lyle, and Colin Plant tells me that during May and June 2004 freshly emerged adults have been turning up in one or two places across northern London, suggesting that it is, at least temporarily, resident here.— RACHEL TERRY, 92 Woodville Road, Barnet, Herts EN5 5NJ.

Many-plumed Moth *Alucita hexadactyla* Linnaeus, 1758 (Lep.: Alucitidae) — extended copulation period

That moths may spend many hours in copulation is well known, but documented records apparently relate only to larger species (Young, M., *The Natural History of Moths*, London, 1997). At 2100 hrs GMT on 2 April 2004 I found a pair of Many-plumed moths copulating on my garage window frame. They were still in the same position at 0700 hrs the next morning and remained so until 1800 hrs when they moved half a metre up the mullion. They remained there, still in copulation, until at least 2200 hrs, but had gone by the following morning. They were thus in copulation